

A recruitment booth in a Broadway, New York, movie theatre during 'Merchant Marine Week', 1943. The reference to 'Action In the North Atlantic' was for a wartime film about convoy duty on a Liberty ship that was playing in the theatre at the time. The Maritime Service needed new recruits to crew all the ships built for the war. They even took felons from prison, those with disabilities, and others too old to serve in the military.



New trainees arriving at US Maritime training Station, St Petersburg, Florida.



the theory that yellow fever is transmitted by mosquitoes rather than direct contact – summers in New York City spelled yellow fever and death. Staten Islanders had every reason to fear the fever: in 1848 it spread from the quarantine hospital in Tompkinsville to infect 180 local residents. Citizens were enraged beyond control and burned down the quarantine hospitals. The city's solution was to build Hoffman and Swinburne Islands and relocate the hospitals out into the harbour. The two small islands also played a major role in the mass immigration of the period, protecting the

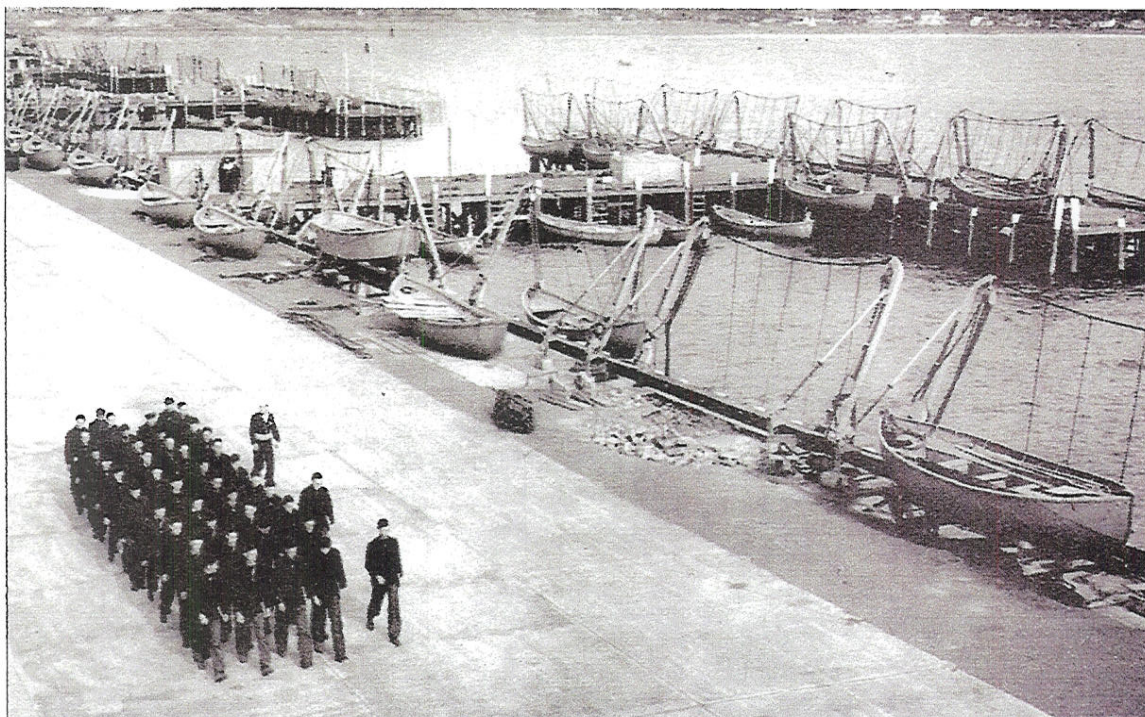
port from disease until Ellis Island was expanded and operations moved there. And they played a role in the harbour's defence systems in both World War I and II, serving as an anchorage for the anti-submarine nets that closed the entrance to the port.

In 1938 the newly formed US Maritime Service was in search of a location for its first training station. The former quarantine islands had not been used for many years, yet were in good condition – in 1937 Hoffman had had new buildings built that were never used. On 6 September 1938 Hoffman and Swinburne opened for training. The new trainees were all experienced seamen, both licensed and unlicensed. To be eligible for paid training men had to be unemployed, have had seven months' sea time in the last two years, and be over twenty-one years of age. Changes in requirements were constantly made as the training programme was developed.

The nation still had not totally come out of the Depression and the maritime unions were not supportive of upgrading men when many of their skilled members were unemployed. But the incentive for seamen to enroll was three months' training with pay, subsistence, uniforms, and the opportunity for retainer pay and annual training.

The fact that many of the higher ranking officers of the Maritime Service – including those who served as US Navy officers

Lifeboat training was one of the most important parts of the course for all ship-board department trainees at Sheepshead Bay.



to train pursers and then added Hospital Corpsmen to the rank. This gave each ship the security of having someone aboard who could administer medical aid. The course was started at Sheepshead Bay in 1942 under the direction of a Public Health Service doctor and combined the Junior Assistant Purser School and the Hospital Corps School. The main mission of the school was to train men to work on their own, being responsible – on board ship – only to the master. The programme accepted apprentice seamen who tested high on the General Classification Test (GCT) along with pursers who had previous experience at sea. After completing the sixteen-week course trainees were assigned to the US Public Service Marine Hospital for a month of further training. Any ship with a Purser/Hospital Corpsman officer also carried blood plasma in the ship's medical supplies.

Merchant marine deck and engineering officers in World War II came from four different sources: the Maritime Academies or school ships, the Federal Merchant Marine Cadet Corps, the Maritime Service officers-training programme, and 'through the hawsepipes' – men who studied on their own after getting the required seetime. It is interesting to note that of the four entry routes all still exist, with the exception of the officers-training programme of the Maritime Service.

All officers received some benefits, upgrading, specialized training, and correspondent courses from the Maritime Service programmes. Refreshers and upgrading were one of the first missions of the service in 1938. Licensed personnel could, if they wanted, receive USMS commissions with rank according to their licences – all graduates of the state maritime academies and the US Merchant Marine Cadet Corps were commissioned ensigns,



Winter Uniform
Red Patch



An artist's rendition of a trainee in Maritime Service uniform with the distinctive usms red patches. Note the dark-blue sailor's hat, which were introduced later. When the service was first started, in 1938, trainees wore uniforms similar to the US Coast Guard, including white sailor hats. In the right corner is the official colour seal of the US Maritime Service.